ABSTRACT
              A study investigated the learning strategies and perceptions
of second language learning of 12 students of advanced
English-as-a-Second-Language at National-Louis University (Illinois). All
subjects were surveyed, and one (Sasha), an articulate and highly motivated
Ukrainian student, was interviewed in depth as a case study. Subjects were
administered questionnaires on strategies used in reading and writing
English. Results indicate that Sasha was not always typical of his peers. He
was most different in ranking grammar rules and background knowledge as
important, and gave a lower than average importance to correct pronunciation,
spelling, and sharing ideas. He ranked his listening skills higher than other
skills, while most ranked reading and writing skills higher than listening or
speaking. He valued vocabulary knowledge highly, eschewed guessing, used
translation frequently, and showed careful study habits. He reads mostly to
gain information, and less so to improve English skills and for
entertainment. Sasha's answers to the writing questionnaire were similar to
his classmates' in many areas, but differed in some, including his very
strong preferences concerning a number of composition processes. Implications
for second language instruction are discussed. Contains six references. (MSE)

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STRATEGIES AND PERCEPTIONS

OF SECOND LANGUAGE STUDENTS

Anna C. Kim

and

Carol Eckermann

National-Louis University

2840 Sheridan Road

Evanston, IL 60201

847 475 1100 X2357

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ABSTRACT

Second language college students may have different perceptions of academic English requirements than we may be aware of. Their strategies in acquiring a second language may be effective or based on these false assumptions. On the other hand, teachers of English may not take into consideration the different rhetorical styles that reflect the native cultures and languages of these students. Consequently, there is often a mismatch between instructor and student expectations. Becoming aware of students' beliefs and strategies will assist instructors in better meeting the needs of their second language students.

Strategies and Perceptions

of Second Language College Students

Because of the large number of second language students entering our colleges, instructors need to be aware of the perceptions that these students most commonly have about the expectations of academia, as they are acquiring a second language. Misperceptions on the part of student and instructor alike have often led to a mismatch of expectations. Becoming aware of the strategies employed by second language students can promote more effective educational practice on the part of college instructors.

Literature Review

Reid (1989) reported that the problem of communicating successfully originates from the second language student's limited perception of what is expected from his university professors. They operate with a different set of cultural assumptions which are inappropriate for the expectations of the U.S. academic audience.

In fact, the expectations of second language teachers and their students may not always coincide. Mohan and Lo (1985) found that Chinese students composing in English felt that the teacher valued correct grammatical expression more than organizational form. In addition, Land and Whitley (1989)

stated that the goal of present methods of evaluating writing appears to be that second language students become entirely fluent in English. They suggest instead recognizing and appreciating the differences in cultures and languages which are reflected in their rhetorical patterns when writing in English.

Student Surveys

Several surveys have been conducted to assess the attitudes and strategies of college students as they are acquiring a second language. Abraham & Vann (1987) studied the strategies of successful and unsuccessful college-age students trying to pass the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). They found that the successful student used a greater variety of strategies and matched his choice of strategy to the demands of the task.

The students showed a belief that language learning requires attention to both function and form. They concluded that a combination of maturity in learning and intelligence disposed the successful student to take this approach to language learning.

In Chamot's study (1987), intermediate level students reported using metacognitive strategies more frequently than did beginning level students. This probably indicates that a certain basic second language proficiency may be a precondition for students to be able to reflect on their own learning style and compare their own output to that of a native speaker. Krashen (1982) also found that monitoring is used primarily by

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students who have had greater exposure to the new language.

The students' degree of metalinguistic awareness indicated an ability to compare their first language to their second, to transfer linguistic knowledge and to evaluate their degree of success in using the new language (Chamot). They were aware of paralinguistic factors and style and register differences. However, they were also aware of the limitations of translation. Both beginning and intermediate level students favored repetition as the most frequently used strategy.

Methodology

Comparing student perceptions

We chose as our case study subject a college student from Ukraine named Sasha who was highly motivated and, most importantly, who could articulate his mental processes as he was acquiring his second language. He had graduated from a music college and had conducted several church choirs while in Ukraine.

We administered questionnaires to other second language college students at National as well as to Sasha, so as to compare his answers concerning his perceptions and strategies when reading and writing in a second language with theirs. We needed to determine how typical he might be to other second language students. Extensive interviews with our case study

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subject were also used to make these comparisons.

Reading Questionnaire

Twelve students taking the Communication Development course at National-Louis University took the Reading Questionnaire (Jung, 1992). Having completed Level V, they were already quite proficient in the English language and were able to ascertain their own strategies and perceptions of their language abilities. We selected certain items from the questionnaire which we felt would be most appropriate for analysis and comparison (Table 1). Answers ranged from 1 (never) to 7 (always).

Results

Comparison of Subject with Classmates

Sasha was not always typical of most Language Institute students. He was most different in ranking knowledge of the grammar rules as being very important. Only one-third of the respondents put as much emphasis ont his aspect of reading comprehension. He also described having background knowledge of the topic as very important. This requirement was similarly ranked by only one-third of the respondents.

Sasha was lower than the average in assessing the importance of correct accents and spelling and with sharing ideas with others. This may have been a reflection of his fundamental need

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Table 1

Reading Questionnaire

N=13

																	case study	AV

1 = Never, not important
7 = Always, very important

Selected items:

																case study	AV
p.7 I #11 a. rules	4	4	4	4	6	4	3	7	4	7	5	7		7	5
f. spell.	5	2	7	3	6	3	1	4	7	1	4	6		2	4
g. sharing	3	3	7	3	5	6	3	4	4	5	2	4		2	4
h. bkgnd.	5	5	7	3	5	3	7	5	1	7	3	3		7	4.5
j. transl.	5	4	6	2	5	4	7	1	4	1	2	4		5	4
p.11 #1 yrs. U.S.	1	2	15	1	2	2	1	1	2	5	1	2		1	3
p.12 #9 Engl.in native country	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y		N	N
p.13 II #11 rank Eng. lang.	3	2	4	2	3	3	2	4	3	3	3	3		2	3
#15. rank lang. abilities															
a.Spk.	3	4	1	4	4	4	3	4	3	3	3	3		2	3
b. List.	4	3	4	1	2	2	2	3	1	4	4	1		1	2.5
c. Rdg.	1	1	2	2	3	1	1	2	2	2	2	2		3	2
d. Writ.	2	2	3	3	1	3	4	1	4	1	1	4		4	2

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for privacy or a belief he was more advanced than his peers.

Our subject generally ranked his own second language abilities as being limited, with listening as his best skill, followed in order by speaking, reading and writing. His classmates, on the other hand, ranked their reading and writing abilities higher than their listening and speaking, both in the areas of production. Because of our subject's musical performance background, he may have developed better listening and speaking skills. This was especially evident in his excellent English pronunciation.

Out of a total of 100 points, Sasha also believed that reading most improved his skill in grammar and structure (35 points) and writing ability (15 points). These perceptions were later triangulated with his retrospective interviews and found to be consistent. He ranked grammar exercises as the major focus of the Language Institute program, followed by vocabulary-reading strategies, discussion of topics, writing, and pronunciation.

Vocabulary

The section dealing with vocabulary was especially interesting. Sasha indicated he would feel very uncomfortable (6) depending on how many words he didn't undestand. He almost always (6) looks up unfamiliar words in the dictionary. From later interviews, he revealed that he often used four dictionaries to check every unknown word.

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Although he relates the current reading to his personal experience of what he already knows about the topic (7), he seldom (3) guesses what the following part will say. He later added that guessing is being lazy and that he recommends to his friends that they look up all unfamiliar words lest they miss the meaning of the text.

Translation Between Languages

As a second language learner, Sasha nearly always tries to translate what he is reading into his own language (6), since his current stage of language development had precluded using and thinking in English. This was seldom true for his classmates, however.

Sasha underlines interesting or important ideas as he reads and makes a list of unfamiliar words to study later (7). He always checks to see if he understands what he is reading and rereads (7), slows down, guesses at the meaning using the context (7) or guesses based on what he knows about the topic (7).

His recommendations for someone from his own country who was trying to improve his reading was "to read a lot, learn a lot and everywhere, take advantage of being in this country in close contact with English speakers."

Purposes for reading

When Sasha evaluated the purposes he had for reading, he gave 50 points for "finding specific information related to my

particular interest or major field of study" and 30 points to improving English language ability. This left 20 points each for entertainment and general information.

During an interview in May of 1995, Sasha emphasized the importance of reading for writing in English. "Americans who love to do everything simple, linear and plain; you get exactly the examples of usage in your reading."

He also explained the importance of learning the grammar of a second language. "Each acquaintance with any grammar pattern is useful, very important while reading...That's why I can read. It's better than those who do know more vocabulary because structures sometimes say more than vocabulary."

Writing Questionnaire

We formulated a writing questionnaire similar to the reading questionnaire which forty-seven students taking Communication Development completed. Their answers to questions dealing with attitudes, perceptions, and aptitudes were also compared to Sasha's (Table 2).

Sasha's answers were basically the same as his classmates' in half the areas selected for analysis, but he was different in several significant areas. On a scale from 1 to 7, "1" being never and "7" being always, Sasha answered in the affirmative (7) for four areas. Unlike some of his classmates, Sasha always (7) thinks of ways to answer an essay question and writes them

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Table 2

Writing Questionnaire

Page	No.	Question 1=Never 7=Always N=47	Av. Ans. NLU	Case Study NLU
1	8	Read each part of essay question	5	6
1	9	Think of ways to answer	5	7
2	10	Write down ideas	3	7
	11	Create map or outline	3	6
	12	Write ideas in native lang.	2	5
	13	Discouraged at looking up words	3	1
	15	Trouble with English mechanics	3	1
	16	Trouble with English punctuation	3	1
	17	Difficulty with plurals	2	5
	18	Articles give me trouble	3	4
	19	Pronouns are hard for me	3	1
	20	Problems with subject-verb agreement	2	1
	22	Do not worry about mechanics	2	6
	23	Write for meaning; edit later	3	1
3	25	Like to write about my experiences	3	1
	26	Enjoy writing reaction to reading	3	1
	30	Only like writing for myself	2	7

Table 2 (Continued)

		Question	Av ans.	Case Study NLU	Trum
3	31	Emphasis on correct grammar made writing difficult	4	6	2
	32	Topics assigned despite interests	3	3	6
	33	Allowed to free write on own topics	3.5	3	1
	34	Model compositions given	3.5	2	6
	35	Sentence-combining in class	4	7	3
	36	Scales/criteria good writing	4	3	1
	37	Details required for personal experiences	3	1	7
	38	Examined data to support our generalizations	4	2	2
	39	Analyzed ethical problems	3	2	5
	40	Developed arguments about ethical problems	3	2	4

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down.   Unlike his peers, however, he only likes writing for
himself.

Equally interesting is the fact that Sasha was different
from his classmates when he indicated <u>never</u> (1) in ten areas:
1) getting discouraged looking up vocabulary words; 2) having
difficulty with plurals; 3) worrying about the mechanics of
English writing; 4) writing for meaning; 5) writing about his
experiences; 6) writing about his reactions to something he has
read; writing letters to friends; 8) keeping a diary; 9) reading
what his classmates have written; and 10) being allowed to free-
write.

Sasha never had trouble with English word order and question
formation.   While he enjoyed grammar and spelling, he almost
always (6) worries about his spelling.   "I'm sometimes losing my
thoughts because I am in this dirt; in qotation marks, of
grammar, spelling."

Most discouraging at that point in his writing development
was the fact that Sasha indicated he <u>never</u> "wrote for meaning and
edited later."   He added to the questionnaire the following
statement: "This is the problem why sometimes I have difficulties
following my thoughts and plan."   He explained orally during the
process of taking the Writing Questionnaire that "I write for
meaning in Russian, but when I write in English, no, never."

Neither did Sasha like to write about his experiences nor
enjoy writing his reactions to what he had read.   He added to

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the questionnaire that he did not even like to talk [about his experiences or reactions to what he has read], since he was a private person.   "I prefer to write narratives."

He also indicated that he was <u>sometimes</u> a poor writer because of his vocabulary.   "It's still hard to think and write in English.   It's better for me to think in Russian, write in Russian and then to translate into English.   I do what I can do."

He described the cause of his problems in English writing as a result also of his inability to stick to the thesis and being "too wordy" because of his Russian language background.   "In my writing, even in Russian, I would be more logical, much shorter, much straight [<u>sic</u>] and try to use the beauty of the vocabulary. This is what is the art."

Sasha also suggested to others of his age on the questionnaire not to write about big, serious concepts.   He believed it was essential to get used to the way Americans organize their ideas and their support in writing, to work on that schema, and the way to introduce your material to the reader.

Implications

When Sasha had attempted to be creative in his very first composition in Level I, his efforts had been stifled.   The need to stick to certain verb forms and grammar patterns in his writing had made it tedious, so that it was not surprising that

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he considered them mere exercises. In retrospective interviews, Sasha admitted that the emphasis on grammar and correctness had made writing sometimes difficult for him. In fact, a writer's block seemed to have infected him during Level V of the Language Institute.

However, when writing became meaningful and had a purpose, the writing process became unblocked and he was able to write fluidly. The importance of topic choice and creative writing for second language students cannot be overemphasized.

Teachers of English at the college level must become more sensitive to the needs of second language learners and use methods already being employed by teachers at the elementary level. Second language college students need the same freedom to explore and to enjoy the new language and culture they are encountering, as much or even more than their younger second language counterparts.

Differences in rhetorical patterns resulting from their native cultures should be appreciated by college instructors. The great contributions of other perspectives and cultures to the English language could be lost were all second language students forced to adopt the linear, succinct patterns of some English writing, as many second language students perceive them to be.

Finally, an undue emphasis on correct grammar may cause writing anxiety, especially with adult second language students. Anything that can be done to eliminate this "affective filter"

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(Krashen, 1982) will allow the full creativity and motivation for learning a second language be more fully expressed.

The importance of extensive and extended reading for the writing process was made clearer in this study, since it helps to establish the patterns of English usage for the second language student when he writes.

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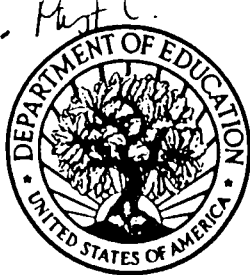
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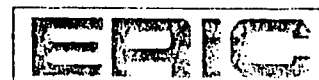
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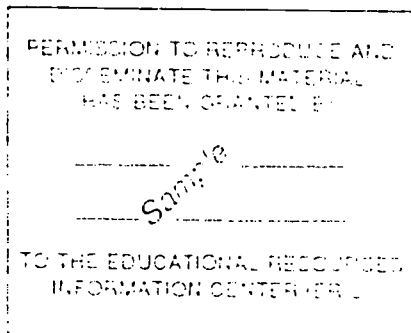| Corporate Source:	Publication Date:

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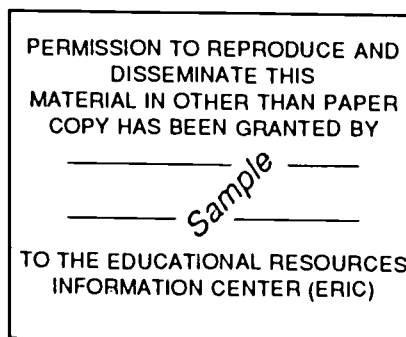
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